



## MSDE BULLETIN

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### SPECIAL EDITION

#### **DR. NANCY GRASMICK CALLS FOR 'NEXT STEPS IN EDUCATION REFORM'**

State Superintendent of Schools Nancy S. Grasmick unveiled results of the 2001 Maryland School Performance Report this week, calling on Maryland to take the next steps in education reform. Citing the work of the Visionary Panel for Better Schools, which she established last year to accelerate student achievement, Dr. Grasmick said it's time to build on our system of accountability and begin providing more support to improve classroom instruction.

Dr. Grasmick delayed release of the annual Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) test results for six weeks last November to examine unusual fluctuations in the data (*see story, page 2*). For only the second time since the statewide testing program began in 1993, average scores dipped slightly. Down 1.6 points, the results show *statistically* no change from the previous year. National education experts have since verified those results as sound and accurate.

Despite the slight decline, Dr. Grasmick noted that 43.7 percent of Maryland students performed at the satisfactory level on MSPAP, an overall gain of 12 points since 1993. While the 2001 results show that many schools continue to improve, others are finding it increasingly difficult to make gains on MSPAP, and on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS), a test given to second, fourth and sixth graders that measures similar content.

"The hard work of the last decade has helped us understand that we can make a difference, and we have, in terms of significant improvement in student performance, and in standards and accountability, school safety, gains in attendance, and a declining dropout rate," said Dr. Grasmick.

"Maryland's adoption of high standards and accountability has repeatedly been recognized nationally," she told the crowd of educators and stakeholders assembled for the annual State of Education address. Maryland ranked first in the nation in standards and accountability for the second year in a row, according to *Education Week's* Quality Counts report. "But clearly, there is much more work that needs to be done," she stated.

Numbers compiled by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) indicate that Maryland's flattening performance on MSPAP could be linked to a number of factors, one of which may be a continuing increase in the number of students attending public schools in the state. Since 1993, enrollment has grown by more than 100,000 students. Many of the new students have limited English proficiency, require special education services, or qualify for free or reduced-price meals.

Dr. Grasmick pointed out shining examples of schools that have been successful in addressing these issues. Deale Island School in Somerset County, with a poverty rate of nearly 50 percent, outperforms other schools statewide in 5th grade math and social studies. City Springs Elementary in Baltimore City, despite its challenges in an urban setting and a poverty rate of 94 percent, has improved so much that it is moving out of local reconstitution this year.

"While some schools are working hard to meet the needs of these students, often the increased numbers outpace the resources required to address the problem," Dr. Grasmick said.

At the same time, Maryland has hired nearly 8,000 new teachers in the past year, a number expected to rise as high as 12,000 by 2003. More than 30 percent of public school teachers in the state have fewer than five years' teaching experience. "That's nearly double the number of novice teachers a decade ago," Dr. Grasmick said. She noted that while these teachers are both dedicated and skilled, more needs to be done to create a performance-based teacher certification system that includes better, more thorough preparation in academic content. She noted, as well, that intensive classroom internships will better prepare prospective teachers.

She cited the just-released Visionary Panel report, policy recommendations offered by Achieve, Inc. (a national school-reform advocacy group), and President Bush's education bill, "No Child Left Behind," as coinciding well with the Maryland plan. The Visionary Panel calls for a voluntary statewide curriculum, better alignment of curriculum and testing, and better teacher preparation — components similar to those in the other two plans. "Teacher preparation will be paramount," said Dr. Grasmick. She also called for new incentives for teachers and additional mentoring programs for beginning teachers. Maryland's teacher education programs produced

(more)

## **DR. GRASMICK CALLS FOR 'NEXT STEPS IN EDUCATION REFORM' (Cont.)**

produced fewer than 2,200 graduates last year, the lowest number in a decade.

She noted that high school graduation rates continue to rise, climbing 1.3 percent to 96.7 percent last year. The Manhattan Institute for Policy Research ranked Maryland fifth in the nation for its African American graduation rate, and third for its Hispanic graduation rate. "Last spring, 3,200 more African American students crossed the stage than did in 1993."

"The bottom line is we must never lose sight of our long-term goal to make our schools better. It is clear the state must do more to adjust instruction and to provide the needed resources to meet the changing needs of our students," she said. "The state also must do more to place experienced teachers, principals, and support staff in low-performing schools and in schools with high concentrations of minority or economically disadvantaged students, so that every child can achieve."

Dr. Grasmick concluded by stating, "We have built a solid foundation in school reform. We strongly feel we must now take the next steps to accelerate academic achievement. Our students deserve the very finest education we can deliver." ■

## **HOW TO LOOK AT THIS YEAR'S MARYLAND ASSESSMENT SCORES**

The Maryland State Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) scores released this week offer an important tool that schools can use to improve instruction. At the same time, assessment experts caution that educators should avoid focusing on single year changes in a school's scores, but rather should look at scoring trends that develop over several years before making judgements on the instruction provided.

MSPAP illustrates how well students solve problems; the level at which students apply what they have learned to real world problems; and how well students can relate and use knowledge from different subject areas. The unique test is often cited as a national model, assessing application skills in addition to concepts that are part of most multiple choice exams.

When teachers, administrators and parents look at the newly released 2001 School Performance Report, they should do so with several things in mind:

- **What are the trends over the past five years?** The most accurate measure of school performance comes by analyzing long-term trends.
- **What are the trends in CTBS/5?** MSPAP is just one of many assessment tools used by schools to judge performance over time. The CTBS/5 test, a multiple choice test given in second, fourth and sixth grades, offers

another measure. School-level trends in CTBS/5 and MSPAP often show similar patterns.

- **What are the results in other performance data?** Always check the results of other school and school system assessment and student performance data.
- **Have there been changes in the make-up of the student body at the school?** Maryland schools have grown rapidly in the past decade, changing the demographic make-up of many classrooms. Major changes have occurred in the number of economically disadvantaged students, students with special needs, and students for whom English is a second language. These students often require new strategies and resources to ensure success.
- **Have there been changes in the make-up of the teaching force?** More than 30 percent of Maryland's teachers have less than five years of experience, and the majority of those were trained by colleges and universities outside the state. The number of inexperienced teachers in the state has doubled statewide in the last 10 years. These new staff might be in tested grades or in the grade prior to the testing grade.
- **Were there changes to classroom schedules or adjustments in any curriculum or instructional practices?** Such change can contribute to changing assessment scores.
- **Finally, has student work been analyzed?** MSPAP has been designed as a diagnostic tool for school staff to use. By making adjustments to curriculum and instructional practices, individual schools can influence a positive change in student work.

For the first time in the history of MSPAP, release of the 2001 school performance report was delayed while researchers Dr. Brian Gong and Dr. Richard Hill of the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment, Inc., looked for possible explanations for unusual patterns in school level test results that appeared in early results last fall. At MSDE's request, the researchers reviewed procedures and data produced by the state and its testing contractors CTB McGraw-Hill and Measurement Incorporate in developing, administering, scoring, and analyzing the 2001 MSPAP.

When Drs. Gong and Hill completed their work last week, they sent a brief statement to MSDE indicating their confidence that the 2001 results could appropriately be reported and used by education officials, along with the additional data described above, for accountability and planning purposes. ■

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